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Viewing cable 06SANSALVADOR2972, FMLN CONVENTION GOES STALINIST, LOOKING AHEAD TO

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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
06SANSALVADOR2972	2006-12-19 19:57	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy San Salvador

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 002972

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2026
TAGS: [ES](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: FMLN CONVENTION GOES STALINIST, LOOKING AHEAD TO 2009

REF: A. SAN SALVADOR 2008
 B. SAN SALVADOR 2056
 C. SAN SALVADOR 2508

¶11. (C) SUMMARY: In its December 17 national convention, the Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front (FMLN) Party (with the attendance of 526 delegates known as party militants) overwhelmingly voted into effect new "reforms" whereby open primaries will be abolished, and incumbent party leaders will remain in office through 2009. Under the new system, participants in nationwide consultative meetings of party activists will yield a slate of possible candidates; final decisions on candidates will be made by the National Council (41 voting members) and the Political Commission (19 members). FMLN leaders have strictly forbidden party activists from any contact with media as the process moves ahead. At this point, it is still not clear whether the 2009 FMLN presidential ticket will be headed by an outsider or by an old-line Communist Party stalwart. END SUMMARY.

¶12. (C) The FMLN, which long prided itself on its open primaries, moved away from transparent internal processes between their 2004 presidential defeat and 2006 municipal and Legislative Assembly elections. An April 2005 convention suspended open primaries in favor of hardliner-appointed special commissions that selected candidates by a process of "consensus" that lacked transparency. Under the newly-enacted procedures, the National Council will select candidates for the presidential ticket and choose Legislative Assembly candidates (the latter of which was previously the responsibility of 14 departmental directorates), while the Political Commission will control the selection of candidates for municipal and departmental offices, as well as appointments to internal offices. FMLN Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) Deputy Nidia Diaz opined that primaries resulted in "weakness", and that the concentration of greater power in the party's incumbent leadership would result in greater "cohesion". Other prominent FMLN leaders asserted that the new procedures--basically off-limits to the press--will be less subject to interference and distortion by the nation's generally-conservative news media. Stripped of any functions relating to the election of new officers to the FMLN's key ruling bodies, the purpose of the December 17 convention was simply to ratify the hardliners' "reforms". With a bizarre logic, the party tried to spin their move with the press, announcing that "democracy is not elections, democracy is the people participating in popular governance."

¶13. (C) In a November 28 conversation with poloff, moderate FMLN Legislative Assembly Deputy Hugo Martinez lamented his party's increasingly autocratic tendencies and its near-obsessive avoidance of public scrutiny of its internal processes. Martinez related that there remain primarily two views within the FMLN regarding what type of candidate would best serve the party's interests in 2009. Many members of the "Revolutionary Current" hardliner faction formerly controlled by late party strongman Schafik Handal feel that, notwithstanding problems she has already experienced in governing San Salvador (see reftel B), a longtime veteran such as San Salvador Mayor Violeta Menjivar might fare best, while a growing number of grassroots activists believe that a fresh face from outside party ranks--one unassociated with the nation's bloody 12-year armed conflict--is the likelier path to the Casa Presidencial. However, Martinez believes that the Sandinistas' November victory in neighboring Nicaragua has strengthened the hand of the FMLN's most hard-core traditionalists. Notwithstanding his youth, charisma, and good relations with all the FMLN's factions, Martinez's own fortunes do not appear to be rising (see reftel A).

¶14. (C) Moderate and highly-popular Santa Tecla Mayor Oscar Ortiz, although careful to avoid direct criticism of the new "reforms", has opined publicly and to poloff that candidates most acceptable to the FMLN's orthodox leadership are unlikely to appeal to voters outside the party's traditional activist base, which remains too small to elect officials to national office. (Note: The FMLN has lost every postwar presidential election by margins of 22 to 24 percent. End

note.) Ortiz, whom Schafik Handal defeated in bitterly-contested 2003 presidential primaries, is already trying to position himself as a 2009 presidential candidate (see reftel C), and speaks in measured tones of broad consultations and alliance-building as the party moves ahead toward 2009. Longtime FMLN Deputy Salvador Arias was dismissive of Ortiz's pronouncements, emphasizing that "strategy is the fundamental element... the (candidate) must not define the strategy..." Ortiz was present at the December 17 convention, but left prior to the near unanimous

votes for these changes. Ortiz' absence received significant press attention, but was overshadowed by the vociferous opposition to the new changes expressed by Legislative Deputies Calixto Mejia and Emma Julia Fabian from La Libertad Department. Mejia, to a chorus of boos at the Convention, quipped that he had been selected for three years for his position in party leadership and that he could not remember anyone mentioning six years as part of the deal.

¶15. (C) Revolutionary Democratic Front (FDR) National Coordinator Julio Hernandez (a former FMLN Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) Magistrate) painted a quite different scenario in a December 14 conversation with poloff. Hernandez outlined how the FMLN leadership has already settled on selecting an "outsider" to run for president in 2009, and that the three finalists under consideration are Arturo Zablah, Mauricio Funes, and Supreme Court Justice Victoria "Vicki" de Aviles, with an old-guard party veteran in the vice presidential slot--likely either Deputy Sigfrido Reyes or Assembly Delegation Chief Salvador Sanchez Ceren. (See reftel C.) According to Hernandez, the "reforms" passed by the orthodox FMLN leadership are meant to ensure lockstep discipline precisely out of fear that an outside candidate could establish his or her own power base within the FMLN. Hernandez reports that in his private meetings with both Zablah and Funes, both have expressed their distaste at the idea of serving as mere figureheads and mouthpieces for FMLN orthodoxy, without being allowed to develop their own agendas and appoint their own advisors and cabinet members. Hernandez also reported that the FDR is considering offers of a 2009 alliance from the FMLN, but that many of his FDR colleagues' painful 2004-2006 experiences with the FMLN make them hesitant to accept such overtures.

¶16. (C) COMMENT: The FMLN has now taken a clear step back from their semi-democratic Marxist structure to a clear Stalinist "democratic centralist" model. In addition, the elimination of primaries will allow the now majority Communist Party leadership to exert full internal control, and will likely lead to the next major party purge. Prime victims in this purge will be Oscar Ortiz, Calixto Mejia, and most of the La Libertad department delegates. It is not clear at this point whether the FMLN leadership will use their monopoly on power to select a hardliner, or seek to co-opt an outsider as their 2009 presidential candidate.
Barclay

=====CABLE ENDS=====